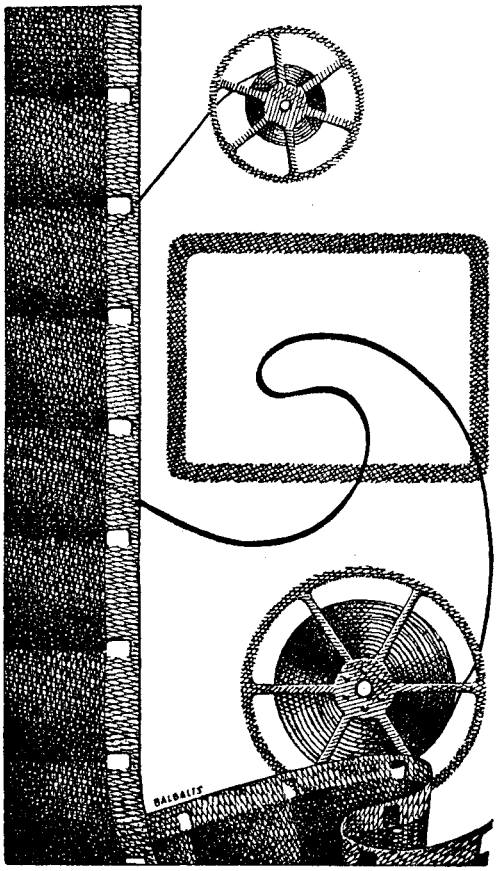
THE CLAUDEL-GIDE CORRESPONDENCE
– Martin Turnell

THE Commonweal

CATHOLICS AND HOLLYWOOD
Walter Kerr



THE STATE OF THE MOVIES

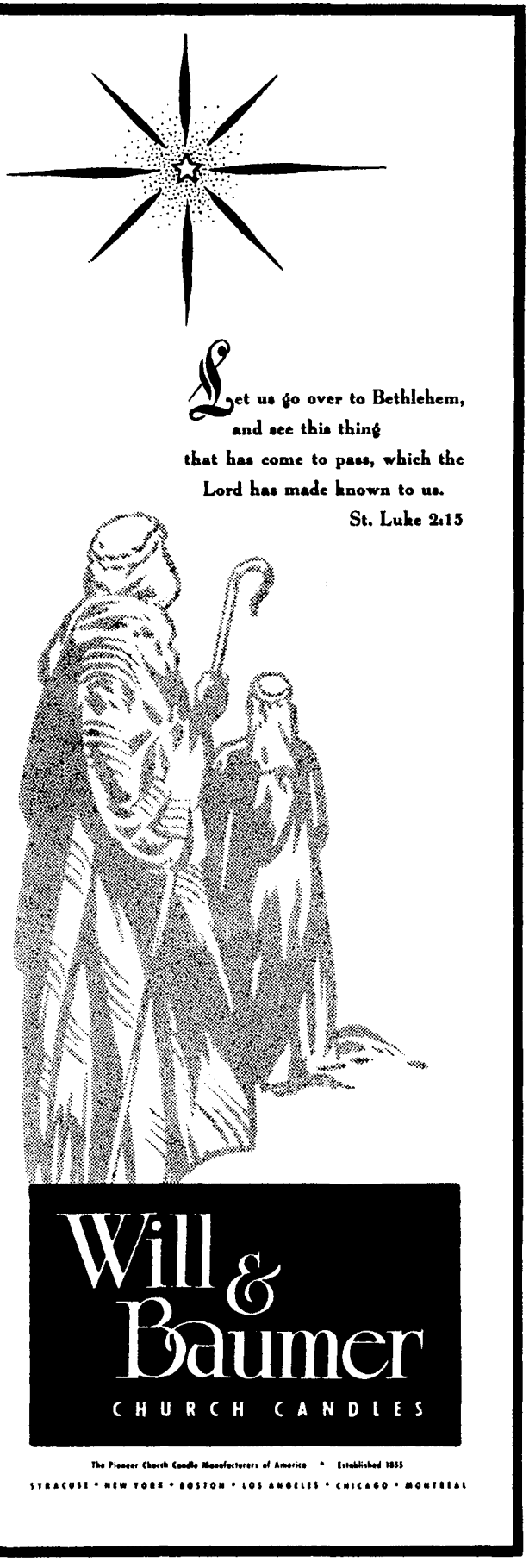
Emmet Lavery

Dore Schary

Manny Farber

Volume LVII, Number 11 December 19, 1952 Twenty Cents

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED


Let us go over to Bethlehem,
and see this thing
that has come to pass, which the
Lord has made known to us.
St. Luke 2:15
Will & Baumer
CHURCH CANDLES
The Pioneer Church Candle Manufacturers of America • Established 1855
SYRACUSE • NEW YORK • BOSTON • LOS ANGELES • CHICAGO • MONTREAL

THIS WEEK

Week by Week 271

Catholics and Hollywood
by Walter Kerr 275

The State of the Movies
Is Decency Enough?
by Emmet Lavery 278

Better Than Ever
by Dore Schary 279

Blame the Audience
by Manny Farber 280

The Problem of Ownership
by Michael P. Fogarty 281

The Stage
by Richard Hayes 283

The Screen
by Philip T. Hartung 283

The Claudel-Gide Correspondence
by Martin Turnell 284

Book Reviews 287

THE COMMONWEAL
386 FOURTH AVENUE
NEW YORK 16

EDWARD S. SKILLIN: *Editor*
JOHN COGLEY: *Executive Editor*
JAMES O'GARA: *Managing Editor*
WILLIAM P. CLANCY: *Assistant Editor*

WILLIAM PFAFF: *Assistant Editor*
(on leave with the Armed Forces)

Associate Editors:
JOHN C. CORT
PHILIP T. HARTUNG

Contributing Editors:
PHILIP BURNHAM, ANNE FREMANTLE

JOHN BRUBAKER: *Advertising Manager*

Published weekly, printed and copyrighted 1952, in the U. S. A., by The Commonweal Publishing Co., Inc., 386 Fourth Ave., New York 16, N. Y. MUrray Hill 3-9685. Entered as second-class matter, February 9, 1934, at the post office at New York, N. Y., under the act of March 3, 1879. U. S. and Canada, $7 a year. Foreign, $8. Single copies, 20c.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

THE Commonweal

week by week

THE CRITICS AND THE GUARDIANS

THE history of the motion picture is, in microcosm, the history of many of the twentieth century's most vexing cultural problems, for as a triumph of technical civilization, the motion picture has magnified and exhibited for all the world to see problems basic to both its genre and its milieu. Like other phenomena of twentieth-century life, it has grown very big very fast, and, again like them, it has shared in the accusation that its physical progress has been matched by no corresponding moral and intellectual maturity.

And so, though it was designed primarily as a medium of pure "entertainment" for a mass audience, the motion picture has been accused of catering to the lowest artistic standards found in that audience and consequently of lowering rather than raising modern taste. The critics have demanded that it "grow-up" by recognizing a responsibility to provide not only what an audience wants but also what it needs. They have asked that it become actually what it clearly is potentially: the most dynamic art form ever available to man.

But the motion picture itself has shown no remarkable eagerness to leave the secure world of its childhood for the sake of a more hazardous adulthood. And it has sometimes been petulantly impatient with critical friends who try to hasten it there. Its periodic excursions from the garden have not always been pleasant or rewarding, and it has found that by obeying a few basic rules of conduct provided by its guardians, it can perhaps romp and play forever without ever hurting itself. The guardians, for their part, have frequently been content with this situation, happy in the knowledge that junior is safe.

Their content is understandable, for they know of what mischief the motion picture is capable when it is left completely undisciplined. But the result has been a constant quarrel between the motion picture's guardians and its critics. The former want it to be "good"; the latter want it to be "adult."

In the struggle Catholic influence has been overwhelmingly ranged on the side of the guardians. That such should be the case is understandable enough. No Catholic could concur in Oscar Wilde's dictum that "art rejects the burden of the human spirit;" he knows that the burden of the human spirit is the very stuff of art and that to reject its moral ramifications is to reject art itself. To see that no such rejection occurs in American films has become the Catholics' self-appointed task. To this end Catholics organized the Legion of Decency.

THE organization of the Legion in 1932 was a national necessity. The Hollywood film industry had allowed the motion picture to become a vehicle for the most deplorable kind of sex sensationalism. Its reputation was notorious. The formulation of the famous Hollywood Production Code, often believed to have been the work of the Catholic hierarchy, was actually instigated by the leading film producers themselves in a tardy effort to protect their medium from its own worst instincts. Their overgrown child was dirty, and those who cleaned him up and taught him some rules of elementary decency deserved well of both art and prudence.

And, let it be clearly stated, no process of "growing-up" should ever mean that these lessons be unlearned or that a reversion to earlier habits should take place. The critics should be the first to admit this. Adulthood must mean, if anything, an increase rather than a decrease of moral responsibility.

But the critics insist that adults can be "good" too, and that knowledge which would be considered shocking in a child may well become a man. The quarrel of the responsible critic with the "guardian" approach to motion pictures should not be so much a question of morals, then, as it is a problem in manners.

The critic may resent, for example, a type of "guardianship" which, because it disapproves of, say, houses of prostitution, would deny motion pictures the right to recognize, explicitly, the existence of such institutions. He does not believe that knowledge is necessarily dangerous. He would

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

therefore ask a motion picture art which is frank and fearless in facing up to the unpleasant and even the sordid in human experience (an art which, in Christian terminology, recognizes the consequences of Original Sin and a world unconscious of grace), but one which does so without falling into that cheap connivance with depravity which it is the special function of the guardians to combat.

To achieve a climate wherein the critics and the guardians can work together for the creation of a more intellectually and morally mature motion picture art is a difficult task, because the feeling between them is deep and sometimes bitter. But it is an important task and it is one from which Catholics should not be absent. It is with this end in mind that The Commonweal publishes this week a special discussion on the role of the motion picture in contemporary American culture.

PATTERN OF CRIME AND CORRUPTION

THE first week's public hearings conducted by the New York State Crime Commission brought forth enough evidence to indict the whole method of operations in what is still far and away this nation's largest seaport. On the basis of what is now public record, a number of personal indictments also appear inevitable. But at present writing there is great doubt whether the hearings will put the finger on the key figures in the New York dock rackets.

This nefarious situation of wholesale bribery, notorious criminals as pier bosses, widespread pilfering of incoming and outgoing cargoes and insecurity of life and limb (not to mention adequate employment) for the great majority of the city's dock workers derives from multiple causes. Each group involved in the process of getting goods from land carriers to ships, or vice versa, bears a heavy responsibility, according to the sworn testimony that has already been given.

The big steamship lines have a leading share. Individually they appear to have been all too ready to hand out protection money to safeguard their cargoes and avoid delays. By their operating scale, the sums involved in getting rid of such nuisances were comparatively small. Collectively the companies have failed to stand together against the racketeers—a measure that would have been quite feasible considering their size and their economic strength. For they were in a position to withstand force with force.

Doubtless this is less true of the stevedoring companies unless those unwilling to pay off had presented a united front with the steamship companies.

Then there are the locals of the International Longshoremen's Association, an AFL union. Many of these are little dictatorships from which the rank and file have no recourse; as with the piers, the bosses of many of the locals are notorious gunmen. Why in all the years this was common knowledge, has the American Federation of Labor failed to revoke the ILA's charter or seriously insist on a clean-up on the waterfront?

One of the reasons racketeering is possible on its present scale is the shape-up, which gives the pier boss ironclad control over who works on his dock each day and who must look elsewhere. Rotary hiring halls in other ports have long since demonstrated their ability to distribute available work on an equitable basis and at the same time keep control over individual livelihoods out of the hands of the few.

What is to be said of the responsibilities of the public authorities in these matters? Local police have been unable or unwilling to protect life and limb on city piers; large-scale thefts and even brutal murders have flagrantly gone unpunished. Local politicians are shown to be intimates of notorious waterfront mobsters; national political organizations accept lavish donations from waterfront bosses whose operations are known to be of the most dubious sort. A law-abiding citizen, threatened by extortion or worse, under these conditions has nowhere to turn.

The system is all wrong and the men with responsibility for its continued functioning have much to answer for. By now the general public is pretty well apprised of the situation. The disquieting thought is that despite this knowledge public lethargy is so great that things may continue in the

NEXT WEEK

GUNNAR D. KUMLIEN writes, in the Christmas Issue, of a conversation with the caretaker of a big military cemetery near Monte Cassino.

"He had the same attitude towards war as so many of his countrymen. Consciously or unconsciously they consider it a cataclysm exactly like an earthquake or a flood. The natural attitude of a man threatened by an earthquake or a flood is to try to suffer from it as little as possible. Too many foreign armies have passed through this lovely Italy through the centuries, from North to South and from South to North, always leaving behind their tombs and dead heroes. . . . The Italian cannot convince himself that a war, any war, is worth fighting."

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

New York harbor area along much the same pattern as before.

CONGRESSIONAL PROBE

THE power of Congress to carry out investigations is an important one which should not be denied. But too many Congressional investigations in recent years have been carried out in an atmosphere of sensationalism and headline-hunting, and as a result they have done little to strengthen public confidence in the objectivity and reliability of their findings.

One of the best examples of this kind of irresponsible procedure was provided by the old House Un-American Activities Committee, back in the days when it was under the chairmanship of Representative Martin Dies of Texas. Congressman Dies was, to all appearances, constitutionally incapable of distinguishing between the liberal and the genuinely subversive. This fact, combined with a passion for personal publicity, made him cry "wolf!" at lambs so often that many honorable men soon turned away in disgust.

At this stage in its life, the House Un-American Activities Committee often demonstrated the Congressional investigation at its worst. What was supposed to be an investigation too often resembled a trial, and that trial was too frequently conducted via newspaper headlines rather than by anything that even vaguely resembled courtroom procedure.

Early in the Committee's life, many people concluded that hatred for the New Deal was the chief motivating force behind its activities. From the vantage point of the present, there seems to be little doubt that in the long run the methods of this Committee seriously hindered the chances for really fruitful inquiry into subversive activities. Whittaker Chambers testified before this Committee, for example, long before his name had become a household word. But in the flurry created by Dies' extravagant broadsides and by the efforts of Representative Rankin to find grist for his anti-Semitic mill, the significance of Chambers' testimony was largely missed.

The harm done by such conduct is not easily undone. This is true, not only because private reputations were needlessly blackened and genuine efforts to arrive at the truth impaired, but also because public confidence in all Congressional inquiries was seriously weakened. The memory of such investigations lingers on, and in the years that have elapsed since the heyday of Martin Dies, too many other investigations have closely followed the path he charted.

Under these circumstances, it is important that proper recognition be accorded Congressional investigations which work along less publicized but more productive lines. One of these, now winding up its work, is a seven-man House Committee set up to study the nation's tax-exempt foundations.

The Committee did not get under way too happily. Chairman Eugene E. Cox, Democrat of Georgia, started off on the wrong foot by offering a resolution in which he described the aim of the Committee this way: ". . . especially to determine which such foundations . . . are using their resources for un-American and subversive activities or for other purposes not in the interest or tradition of the United States." Naturally enough the foundations felt this amounted to pronouncing sentence before the evidence had even been introduced.

Then Committee Counsel Harold M. Keele took over. A Republican lawyer and formerly an Assistant United States District Attorney, Mr. Keele insisted on a free hand in running the investigation. By banning all "leaks" to friendly newspapers and shunning political maneuvering, he quickly overcame the initial antagonism caused by Representative Cox's early statement.

Without Mr. Keele, the investigation might well have turned into a political circus. Much of the inquiry centered around such controversial points as the reasons for Carnegie Foundation contributions to such organizations as the Institute of Pacific Relations. Irresponsibility by the Committee counsel could well have blown such incidents up out of all proportion and seriously hindered much of the good work done by foundations of this kind. Happily, no such course was followed.

Although it could have captured the front pages many times, the investigation actually appears to have turned up little that is detrimental to the good name of the various foundations. The work of many years was surveyed. Out of the many assorted projects and organizations given assistance, a few were later declared subversive, but their total number was very small. In some cases, requests for funds would certainly have been denied—if the officials in charge knew in 1942 what they know in 1952. In this the foundation officers have plenty of company, but at long last a Congressional inquiry has come along which apparently recognizes this fact.

By and large, the foundations have come through their investigation very well, and from present appearances the final report of the Committee will be designed to assist them in their important work, rather than to capture headlines. This reticence is important news in its own right, and all concerned are to be congratulated.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

CATHOLIC EGGHEADS

THE Catholic egghead suffers the double jeopardy of being misunderstood by his fellow Catholics and of being misinterpreted by his fellow eggheads. As my colleague William P. Clancy put it in his article on "The 'Liberal' Catholic" (*The Commonweal, July 11, 1952*): "Those whose theology he shares frequently distrust him because of his politics, and those with whom he feels at home politically may doubt him because of his theology."

Periodically, in the Catholic press, there is a little flurry of controversy about the "liberal Catholic," which almost always hits far wide of the mark. The old anathemas on nineteenth-century "liberalism" are sounded again, a straw-man "liberal Catholic" who holds all kinds of heretical or near-heretical views is resurrected and then triumphantly demolished with a few apt quotes from authoritative sources, and the whole thing winds up, after the given number of weeks, in a pyrotechnic explosion of semantic irrelevance.

In its present usage, the term "liberal Catholic," for all the learned philosophical discussions it arouses, has very little to do with formal philosophy. It is a practical term devised by the non-Catholic, not the Catholic, world to describe a certain kind of Catholic. The term doesn't describe any theological position or heretical inclination, as critics of the "liberal Catholic" fondly presume—if for no other reason than that the secular writers who employ it are sublimely indifferent to all such matters. Rather it describes what might loosely be called a temperament and an approach to the modern world.

There are bishops who have qualified as "liberal Catholics," and formal heretics—in Boston and elsewhere—who are deemed most un-liberal. I remember a smug little definition of a "liberal Catholic" written in a diocesan paper a few years ago. The author found more that was theologically reprehensible in his creature—for it bore no resemblance to any actual "liberal Catholic"—than Torquemada could have discovered on a particularly good day. But the total result added up to no more than an exercise in rhetoric and the burning at the stake of a simple phantom for the weekend edification and possible enjoyment of the writer's unliberal admirers.

It is, I think, more of a comment on our sectarian spirit and unnecessary separatism than on our orthodoxy that non-Catholics feel it necessary to make some kind of qualification when they describe a Catholic who shows a deep concern for the state of "secular" culture and the common good or who is ready and willing to cooperate in civic undertakings. When such people appear—a Bishop Sheil or a Monsignor Ryan, among the clergy; a George N. Shuster or Jacques Maritain among the laity—they are dubbed "liberal Catholics."

Such people are obviously not narrow or preponderantly negative, nor have they been seduced by the sulky spirit which tempts the devout in an unbelieving world; they do not have any traces of the frozen defensiveness that the "secular" world has often come to expect from Catholics. So their "secular" admirers feel it necessary to add that they are "liberal" Catholics—they do not fit the common stereotype.

It is unfortunate, of course, that the world feels it necessary to make such a qualification. But certainly the qualification doesn't refer to anything essential to Catholicism; rather it has reference to a chilling spirit (product of history and social psychology) that has swept over us American Catholics. "Liberal" may describe, say, Jacques Maritain's temperament and approach; it has nothing to do with his religious orthodoxy or philosophical allegiance. Those who despise Catholic orthodoxy will find it as reprehensible in *The Range of Reason* (M. Maritain's latest book) as in the Managing Editor's weekly column in the Brooklyn *Tablet*.

The difference is that the secularist egghead might conceivably be found reading *The Range of Reason,* and in doing so he might be led to feel that he is not, in Catholic eyes, forever banished from the company of the just, almost as if by some divine decree. Such is M. Maritain's warm Catholic spirit that from reading his book the secularist liberal may get a glimmering of the reception that awaits him in the House that was intended for all men, where he will be welcome and will find anew—beautifully integrated into a divine pattern—all the good things he has loved outside.

This is the happy ending. But, alas, the happy ending is not inevitable. The secularist liberal (or the secularist conservative, for that matter) may feel rather that the narrow spirit, the defensive mechanism, the chip-on-the-shoulder mentality, the private-club atmosphere which he has come to associate with Catholicism are actually essential notes. Instead of being one, holy, Catholic and apostolic, the Church may seem clannish, sanctimonious, obscurantist and sectarian.

When this distorted view of Catholicism seen from without triumphs, even in the face of such contradictory evidence as M. Maritain gloriously offers, the contradiction is too often explained away by the qualifying "liberal" added to the "Catholic." "He *is* a Catholic, but the man is neither narrow, bigoted, pugnacious nor clannish. He is a 'liberal' Catholic!"

This tragic situation, I think—rather than the exhuming and re-slaying of ancient heresies—frames the real problem of the Catholic eggheads.

JOHN COGLEY.

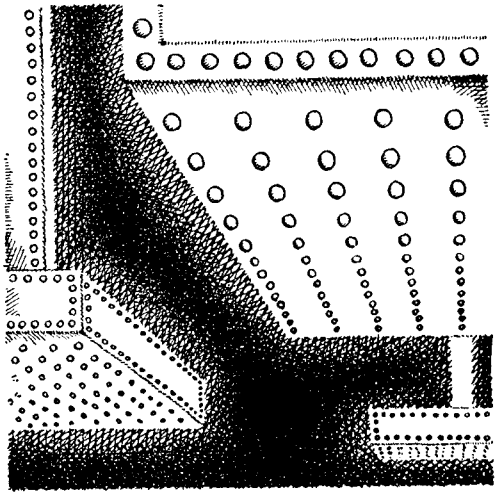
LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Catholics and Hollywood

"THE POWER WHICH CATHOLIC SPOKESMEN HAVE COME TO WIELD OVER THE MOTION PICTURE HELPED MAKE THE MOTION PICTURE EVEN MORE COMMONPLACE THAN IT NEED HAVE BEEN."

WALTER KERR

BAD taste is not one of the seven deadly sins, and nobody is going to Hell for having preferred "Quo Vadis" over "God Needs Men." But neither is there any wisdom in elevating bad taste to the level of a virtue, or in confusing it with virtue itself. And it does seem to me that American Catholic criticism of the popular arts—especially the sort of criticism which is generally meted out to the motion picture—is rapidly driving itself into just such an unattractive, and philosophically untenable, corner.



However inadvertently, and with whatever genuine concern for the moral health of its membership, the Church in this country has permitted itself to become identified with the well-meaning second-rate. In effect, it has seemed to say: "I don't care what the quality of the art work is, so long as its content is innocuous, or perhaps favorably disposed in our direction."

In the most publicized Catholic 'art' award of 1952, the Christophers selected "Quo Vadis." This essay in calculated vulgarity represents, we are told, "creative work of enduring significance." It is "outstanding," not merely because it throws a certain number of Christians to a certain number of lions, but because it lives up to the highest esthetic "standards." The truth, of course, slips out; in presenting the award, Father Keller immediately launches into praise of the film for showing "how a handful of human beings, fired with the love and truth of Christ, were able to overcome the might of Pagan Rome." The esthetic norm is clearly the proselytizing content, if, with a little effort of the imagination, "Quo Vadis" can be considered as really having proselytizing content.

But this avowal—that Christians ought to like "Quo Vadis" because "Quo Vadis" likes Christians—is not a frank one. There is the additional insistence that the film's special pleading, its fairly dim and remote hoeing of the Catholic row, be equated with artistic merit. Because St. Peter has been given a certain amount of footage in this production, this form of logic demands that therefore the movie in question be praised for its craftsmanship.

The intention is virtuous; the execution must therefore not be called into question, must indeed be lauded as supremely desirable. The makers of motion pictures are explicitly urged to go on in the same vein, with the assurance that they will thereby arrive at unparalleled esthetic glories. The *Christopher News Notes* announces that "outstanding personalities in the entertainment and literary fields . . . predict that if similar Christopher Awards are made for the next three or four years, they may do more to stimulate high quality work in these spheres of influence than any other single factor."

The sort of judgment which at best reveals an alarming innocence of the possibilities, of the very texture of art, and which at worst smacks suspiciously of cant, has pretty much become rule-of-thumb for the American Catholic moviegoer. A film featuring a Saint is a film of majestic technical excellence. A film showing a nun driving a jeep is a superbly made comedy. A film embracing a jolly priest, a self-sacrificing Catholic mother, and an anti-Communist message must be defended in the diocesan press from those irresponsible esthetes and conspiratorial leftists—and even worse, those maverick Catholics—who have had the meanness and the malice to question it.

When there is no recent film of obviously Catholic sympathies—no priest in the pulpit, no nun in the backfield, no early-Christian Deborah Kerr in the jaws of a Technicolor lion—the next-best bet, in the current practice of Catholic criticism, is to play it safe. An earlier Christopher award—I am not really out after the Christophers; they got out there by themselves—went to "The Father of the Bride." Now "The Father

Mr. Kerr, long associated with the Drama department at Catholic University, served as drama critic for The Commonweal and is now with the N.Y. Herald Tribune.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

of the Bride" was a pleasant little film, certainly a harmless little film. That it represented the peak of creative achievement, of imaginative artistry, in its given year is, however, fairly doubtful. (If one wanted to be parochially picky about it, one might even raise some doubt about its suitability for an explicitly Catholic award; if the film reflected any social concept at all, it reflected precisely that slick, sentimental, materialistic concept of the two-child two-car family against which pulpit orators have so long and so richly fulminated.)

But it was a film which was kind to babies, kind to parents, generally optimistic about the domestic scene. It was therefore qualified for praise on the highest level of esthetic achievement.

The identification of good will with good work is commonplace in the Catholic press. Unfortunately, the sort of art which Catholics are urged to admire is commonplace, too—and the power which Catholic spokesmen have come to wield over the motion picture has helped make the motion picture even more commonplace than it need have been.

THE penalties of this inverted esthetic—the notion that what is pure is also necessarily perfect—have thus been double. Catholic taste in motion pictures has been frozen at the "unobjectionable," or purity-with-popcorn level, a level which if pursued down the ages, would have called into question nearly every literary or dramatic masterpiece ever produced. (We need not think of such rowdy samples as "Volpone" or "Tartuffe;" a "Phedre" or a "Hamlet" will do.) And the American film has, through the rigid circumscriptions of the production code and the terrors of an unfavorable Legion of Decency rating, been dissuaded from attempting anything complex enough in the way of human behavior to serve as the basis for a new masterpiece.

The first of these penalties—the petrifaction of taste —cannot seem of much moment to men whose urgent concern is the saving of souls. Yet it has far more serious consequences than many an honest moralist realizes: it discredits the entire Catholic intellectual tradition. The man who has been to see "Quo Vadis," and who has then read the Christopher citation, reaches certain conclusions: that the 'Catholic' concept of art is a decidedly primitive one; that it probably rests on similarly primitive philosophical principles; that the Church, when its true colors are showing, is essentially antipathetic to the creative spirit, essentially in league with the vulgar.

The fact that each of these assumptions is thoroughly false, and would seem strange indeed to an Augustine, an Aquinas, or a Newman, is nothing for which the contemporary observer can be held responsible; the impression is thrust upon him, paraded before him, drummed in his ears by the most vocal Catholic spokesmen in the field.

And this conviction that bad taste among Catholics is due to an ineradicable defect deep down in the Catholic philosophical mind leads to new damage: it tends to shut off Catholic intellectual influence altogether. We hear a great deal about the 'influence' which Catholicism has had on the American screen. We forget that this influence has been wholly of one kind: the influence of the pressure group. The Legion of Decency is an economic weapon; the production code was written under the standing fear of boycott. Neither represents an intellectual victory in the sense that an esthetic principle has been stated with such clarity and force as to bring about free assent. The only persuasiveness we have been able to whip up is the persuasiveness of the dollar.

THE barbed-wire barriers of the production code may be up; but the lines of communication are down. The theatergoer, the critic, or the creative artist who stands outside the Church looking in sees only a forbidding tangle of precaution and proscription, over which hovers a halo of bad taste. He does not notice much lively discussion of esthetic value; indeed, he will quickly discover that 'esthetic' is a bad word in vast areas of the Catholic press. He does not notice much effort to liberalize parochial taste; indeed, he will quickly find most such effort labeled 'art-for-art-sakeism.' He will nowhere run across any frank recognition of home truths—such as that a work of art may be perfectly clean and perfectly terrible. That he should feel vaguely uncomfortable in this environment is understandable. That he should reject it is perhaps inevitable. That he should feel, in rejecting it, that he is thereby rejecting the whole body of Catholic thought on the arts, the central content of Catholic philosophy itself, is tragic. Yet by stubbornly praising what is safely banal, by strenuously encouraging a low level of taste, we are fostering such an impression.

Our fear that any recognition of the claims of the 'esthetic' may undermine the Catholic accomplishment to date, our reluctance to encourage any study of the nature of art as art, our insistence that the Catholic contribution stop dead at the cautionary level, have also brought about the second penalty mentioned above: the discouragement of the creative film-maker pursuing the ultimate possibilities of his craft.

Again this is going to seem no serious matter to the man whose whole concern is prudence. The motion picture, this man may tell himself, is probably never going to amount to much, anyway; the dangers of Hollywood indiscretion are greater than the possible damage that may be done to an exceptional film here

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

and there; was Hollywood ever very 'esthetic' in the first place?

To anyone who remembers the standard MGM scenario shortly before the Legion of Decency came into existence—Joan Crawford is Clark Gable's mistress for six reels and triumphantly marries him in the seventh—this attitude may yet evoke a twinge of sympathy, a shrug of endorsement. But cynicism is no friend of truth, despair no incentive to achievement. It is never enough to substitute one vulgarity for another.

Unless one makes an esthetically informed and basically sympathetic approach to a medium, there is a likelihood of replacing one sort of error with another sort; even the "prudent" make mistakes. In the case of the production code, the failure to balance prudence with knowledge would seem to have resulted in some curious philosophical constructions. The notion, for instance, that sin is always, and very precisely, punished in this life would not appear to be Catholic dogma; yet it is at Catholic insistence that the screen echoes and re-echoes the concept.

A few years ago Warners re-made the old Maugham story, "The Letter." In the original, as I remember it, the heroine's infidelity (and her subsequent murder of her lover) was ironically paid off by the prospect of an eternal hell in the company of a husband who now knew the truth. In the re-make, under the code, it was necessary to despatch the adulteress by having a handy native girl slip a knife into her. The new ending was logically improbable, esthetically ambiguous. It was also, it seems to me, morally simple-minded, reflecting a remarkable primitive understanding of the ways of God and men. (It might be mentioned that it was now also necessary to kill off the native girl, instituting a chain of blood vengeance unknown since the "Oresteia.") There are more subtle, and more terrifying, punishments than the code quite envisions. There are also more 'Catholic' ones.

TO take another example more or less at random, the recent filming of "A Streetcar Named Desire" found Stella Kowalski leaving her loutish husband. There was sound enough reason for leaving this man, even apart from his table manners: he had dishonored his wife's sister. But the code which demanded this climax was written under Catholic influence, with the guidance of Catholic spokesmen: is it actually the Catholic position that a wife must leave her husband for infidelity? And what, in this eye-for-an-eye, tooth-for-a-tooth world, has become of the virtue of charity?

Much more importantly, what has become of that profound little maxim Paul Claudel has quoted: "God writes straight with crooked lines?" This is pretty much the crux of the matter, so far as the making of films, or the creation of any sort of art, is concerned. The great artist, be he Claudel or Tolstoi, Racine or Shakespeare, follows the bent of human nature honestly through its aberrant as well as its generous impulses, through its virtues and vices alike, until all fall into place in a complex, but truthful, pattern. The lines are crooked, the ultimate vision straight. What is both wrong and foolish about the present production code is that it insists that God write straight with straight lines, that He attend strictly to business as the business is conceived by an either-or, black-and-white, pay-as-you-go mentality.

Art without crooked lines is unnatural art—inevitably inferior art. And in its production not only the creative mind is betrayed; the Catholic mind, in its fulness, in its scope, in its centricity, is betrayed as well. Because we are terrified that any admission of the legitimate claims of art will send us all dancing off into the perilous realms of "art for art's sake"—though there are a dozen intermediate esthetic positions—we are moving closer and closer to the sort of stand which might well be described as "vulgarity for God's sake." I am not sure that God is well served by any dishonesty, by any distortion of the world He made—not even that distortion which enables us to "take the children."

None of this is meant to say that the motion picture, or any other art form, should be exempted from legitimate criticism. Nor is it meant to say that the motion picture should be exempted from such criticism as may be considered specifically Catholic, specifically drawn from that body of wisdom which the Church has nurtured through the ages. I am not suggesting that a Catholic has no right to raise his voice or even to make use of such pressure tactics as a democratic society actually grants him. I do not really mean to hold out the hope that the Hollywood we know is a seething ferment of crushed genius which will, the moment the code is liberalized or the Legion relaxed, burst forth with a hundred magnificent films.

It is rather to say—as Catholics are so often and so honorably heard to say—that every right involves a responsibility. We have loudly asserted our rights where the screen is concerned; I am not sure that we have accepted, or even realized, our responsibilities, that we have behaved with full justice toward that gift of God which is known as 'art,' toward the artist himself, toward the central tradition of Catholic thought, or even, sometimes, toward the working intellect itself. We have, for instance, talked ourselves into a corner, and into a code, which would automatically prohibit filming certain works of Mauriac, Claudel, Bernanos or Greene. Perversely, we have as Catholics made it difficult for the most distinguished—and the most influential—Catholic creative voices of our time to gain access to this particular medium.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

The State of the Movies

A SCREENWRITER, THE HEAD OF A STUDIO, AND A PROFESSIONAL CRITIC DISCUSS THE FILM INDUSTRY'S "MAJOR OBSTACLES."

IS DECENCY ENOUGH?

EMMET LAVERY

SOME three years ago a few of us in Hollywood were making a film based on the "trial" of Josef Cardinal Mindszenty. During the preparations for production we had occasion to consult a priest who had known the Cardinal. He was impressed by the sincerity of the undertaking and he made suggestions which were very helpful. On only one point was he inclined to be skeptical.

"What is this concern of yours to get the big A from the Legion of Decency?" he inquired. "Better you should be condemned by the Legion! After all, who goes to see a picture that the Legion thinks is wonderful?

"You think I am joking maybe?" he continued. "Well—maybe I am—a little. And yet I ask you another question. Which would bring more people into the theatre—the Legion's approval or the Legion's condemnation?"

In the case of "Guilty of Treason," the analysis was quite accurate. The film got its A-1 rating from the Legion of Decency and very few Catholics went to see it, except in Boston, where Archbishop Cushing gave it his vigorous endorsement. Most of the secular critics liked it, especially in the big cities, and so did most of the theatre managers who booked the film. Catholics, for the most part, showed little interest until the film reappeared a year or two later on the 16 mm. circuits.

In justice to the Legion of Decency, it must be admitted that this is not a simple case of cause-and-effect. With this, as with most box office failures, there are complex factors involved. Many of them have little to do *per se* with the Legion of Decency. Still, the questions raised by the priest, during the making of *Guilty of Treason,* are not easily put aside.

Just what effect *does* a Legion of Decency rating have on most films? Do Catholics make any consistent effort to form a moral judgment on motion pictures, in the light of these listings? Do they attend the films which get A's and do they shun those which are given C? Just what is the average Catholic's attitude toward the Legion pledge which he recites once a year—often without reading it, or having it read to him in advance?

Is the real effect of the Legion's listings to be found in the ranks of movie makers rather than in the columns of movie goers? Is the Legion's basic achievement the ability to tone up the market for good taste, in *advance* of production, through its liaison service with the studios? And if this be so, how long can the liaison endure if the community opinion supporting it is something which, quite possibly, may exist more in theory than in fact?

Perhaps the time has come when some extensive studies should be undertaken in the graduate schools, in order to assist the Legion in reappraising its over-all program of operations. The Legion, after all, is not infallible. It is an administrative agency set up by agreement of the Roman Catholic bishops in the U.S.

Do the listings, as currently compiled, achieve the purpose for which they were set up? Do they, in the final analysis, reflect the substantive truth in the dramatic situations under analysis? What of the so-called "happy endings"? Is it demonstrably true that, in this temporal phase of our existence, "crime does not pay"? Is virtue actually triumphant, at all times and all places?

Some of our European Catholic brethren feel increasing concern over these questions. Freda B. Lockhart (*Blackfriars,* September 1951) points out that "much may be said for the Legion's deliberate self-limitation to a policy of censorship for the faithful and a liaison service with the studio," but she is dismayed by "the literal list of taboos and stipulations which is the most the Legion can hope to impose on the industry's Johnson office." M. Tallenay (*Temoignage Chretien,* March 1951) observes that "in the United States the cinema has confused propriety with morality." He is amazed at the attitude of some Catholic critics here, who would have liked a political revision of "The Bicycle Thief," and he is distressed by the attitude of other critics who think that only "tricky leftists and

Mr. Lavery, one of the founders of the Catholic Theatre Conference, has worked for some years as a Hollywood screenwriter.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

confused liberals" can have any reservations about the form and substance of production codes.

THE Legion will maintain, properly enough, that its present field is not the field of esthetics. Some secular critics will be quick to agree: they are quite convinced that the field should not be enlarged. They will point, for instance, to a certain film version of Dumas' "The Three Musketeers" a few years ago, and they will raise some questions as to the "unfrocking" of Cardinal Richelieu. Was it a friend of the Legion, they will ask, who advised that His Eminence be passed off as a layman? And if so, is this a fair sample of the tinkering with history which might be expected if the field of esthetics were to be explored at more regular intervals on behalf of the Legion?

Admittedly, "the policeman's lot is not a happy one." Especially, the literary policeman's. As matters stand now, many A-1 films could be roundly criticized as mawkish and sentimental nonsense. Their "morality" may be "unobjectionable" for "general patronage" but they add nothing to the development of human personality. Other films, which receive only a qualified approval in the A-2 section, could be acclaimed for their honest efforts to come to grips with some uplifting sense of reality.

Year in and year out, the pattern repeats itself. Catholics, on the whole, do very little for the films that are approved—consider, for example, the feeble support for "Monsieur Vincent" and the more recent "Never Take No for An Answer"—but they are quick to provide plenty of free exploitation for the controversial titles in the B and C sections of the Legion's listings. Some organizations make a lot of noise over Rosselini's "The Miracle"—an average film, neither as good as some critics insisted, nor as bad as others maintained—but they do nothing about Rosselini's more recent film, "The Flowers of St. Francis," which is generally regarded as a thing of joy and beauty.

Perhaps the final solution lies in a new field of operations. What would happen if, for even a limited period of time, someone began to organize audiences instead of listings? What would happen if a few study groups took time out to re-read the parable of the cockle and the wheat, and apply it to the field of film distribution?

Suppose for one year, in one diocese or even one city, people began to support the good films and to ignore the ones they do not like? Suppose they went all out for the best and let the rest go? What then?

As these notes are jotted down, word comes that Warner Brothers have bought John Steinbeck's *East of Eden* and that it will be brought to the screen under the direction of Elia Kazan. Already the tom-toms are beating and we may expect, in due time, a sizzling controversy the like of which has not been seen since David Selznick set out to do "Duel in the Sun." In the end, of course, Warners will make some adjustment, just as Mr. Selznick did at the last minute. It won't really change the basic tone and atmosphere, for those who know the original story, but it may save the studio a painful listing in the C category. The controversy will be good for a lot of copy in the newspapers and it will also be good for many extra dollars at the box office. Unless—

Well, suppose we re-read the parable of the cockle and the wheat.

Just once. Or maybe twice.

BETTER THAN EVER

DORE SCHARY

TO begin with, it seems odd that a medium which has brought to audiences of the world so many classic books and has created so many classics of its own as has the screen, is the proper subject for an article discussing "what major obstacles prevent its development on a more artistic, moral or intellectual basis?".

The world screen today is a mass medium of entertainment and as such functions on the necessary economics that demand produces. If it existed as something other than what it is, it could not have advanced as it has in the last fifty years.

Pictures throughout the world have become more intellectually mature and have probed the morals and mores of many different kinds of people, as an art form. And the major obstacle it faces is exactly the major obstacle faced by every other art—the limited amount of superior talent.

What has prevented the writing of more artistic, moral and intellectually mature books in the last fifteen years? The limited amount of superior talent. What has prevented the development of more artistic, moral and intellectually mature work in the plastic arts? The limited amount of superior talent.

For some fifteen years our world has lived in a welter of tension, disillusionment, war, confusion, changing standards and fear. This kind of a world gives little respite to the philosophical and inspirational artist who requires peace and security on which to build his art.

But throughout this time the motion picture has subsidized and acted as patron for more talent than any other medium. Its economic operation has given it the wherewithal to accomplish this while at the

Mr. Schary is Vice President in charge of production at the Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer studios.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

same time some of its economic strictures have forced a discipline upon the artist that is healthy.

It is irrational and uncommon to assume that anyone and everyone who works in any medium should have superior talent, but a great case can be made for the picture industry to prove that it has stimulated its continued improvement by giving aid and comfort to superior talent and often to talents less deserving.

In the nineteen-twenties, after World War I, there was a renascence in the American theater and in motion pictures which was stimulated by peaceful and prosperous times. It was this era which produced O'Neill, Sherwood, Howard, Hart, Kaufman, Anderson, Rice and Connolly as the vanguard of a great flood of top American playwrighting talent; and it was in this era that talking pictures became a fact and brought to flower the talents of Wyler, Stevens, Capra, Riskin, Selznick, Thalberg, Fleming and many others.

When, hopefully, we reenter an era of real security of the human mind, you will find motion pictures still keeping ahead of every art form in providing opportunity and in helping to maintain a large pool of talented people who will labor to make more films of dignity that will take their place alongside the master works already produced by the artisans of the screen in the first fifty years of its life span.

BLAME THE AUDIENCE

MANNY FARBER

WHILE Hollywood, after all, still makes the best *motion* films, its 1952 products make me want to give Los Angeles back to the Conquistadores. Bad films have piled up faster than they can be reviewed, and the good ones ("Don't Bother to Knock," "Someone to Live For," "Young Man with Ideas," "Room for One More," "The Turning Point," "Clash by Night") succeed only as pale reminders of a rougher era that pretty well ended with the thirties. The people who yell murder at the whole Hollywood business will blame the current blight on censorship, the star system, regimentation, the cloak-and-suit types who run the industry, the dependence of script-writers on a small group of myths, TV, the hounding of the Un-American Activities Committee, and what I shall laughingly call montageless editing.

There is plenty of justification for trying to find what is causing this plague, and I point my thumb accusingly at the audience, the worst in history. The present crowd of moviegoers, particularly the long-haired and intellectual brethren, is a negative one, lacking a workable set of values, or a sense of the basic character of the medium, so that it would surprise me if any honest talent in Hollywood had the heart to make good pictures for it.

Their taste for preciously styled, upper-case effects and brittle sophistication has encouraged Hollywood to turn out some of the most smartly tooled art works of the times—films like "Sunset Boulevard" and "The Beautiful and the Bad," stunning mixtures of mannerism, smooth construction, and cleverly camouflaged hot air. While I find these royal creations pretty good entertainment, I keep telling myself that the audiences craving for costly illusion (over-acting, over-scoring, over-lighting, over-moralizing) may produce total confusion in Hollywood. The industry is still turning out movies that are supposed to be moderately naturalistic, but it must grow puzzled by having to make plain simple facts appear as special and delectable as the audience demands. So what we have to deal with now is a spectator who has Tiffany-styled esthetics and tastes in craftsmanship, and whose idea of good movies is based on an assortment of swell attitudes.

If some stern yearner makes a movie full of bias for the underdog, or a clever actor crowds his role with affectations picked out of real life, or the script writer sets up innumerable situations wherein the camera can ponder over clocks, discarded cigar bands, and assorted bric-a-brac, the audience responds as though it were in the climate of high art.

Faced with such an audience—half tory and half culture bug—Griffith with his practical genius or Sennett with his uninhibited improvising talents would probably have passed up moviemaking for something more virile and exciting.

The reason movies are bad lies in this audience's failure to appreciate, much less fight for, films like the unspectacular, unpolished "B," worked out by a few people with belief and skill in their art, who capture the unworked-over immediacy of life before it has been cooled by "Art." These artists are liberated from such burdens as having to recoup a large investment, or keeping a star's personality intact before the public; they can experiment with inventive new ideas instead of hewing to the old sure-fire box-office formula.

Such pictures are often made in "sleeper" conditions (sometimes even the studio hotshots didn't know they were being made), and depend, for their box-office success, on word-of-mouth approval, instead of "colossal" ads. But since there is no longer an audience response to fresh filmic trends, this type of movie is being replaced by most of the big Hollywood factories with low budget jobs that emulate prodigious spectacles, foreign-film sentiments, or best-seller novels until you can no longer tell the "B" from an "A".

Mr. Farber has served as film critic for several magazines, among them Time, the New Republic and the Nation.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

IN the past, when the audience made box-office hits of modest "B" films, Val Lewton would take a group of young newcomers who delighted in being creative without being fashionably "intellectual," put them to work on a pulp story of voodooists or grave robbers and they would turn out a $214,000 movie with a warm charm and a revolutionary technique. Lewton's novel technique was to tell a tale in which human beings and "things" were interchangeable and psychologically synonymous. His films, distributed strictly on the neighborhood circuit as the lower half of a double bill, would eventually return the RKO studios a million or so in receipts and much more than that in "prestige." Like "The Great McGinty," or "He Walks by Night," the picture would get seen and liked because the people rather than the producers raved about it.

The earliest works of Preston Sturges were of this type, also an energetic, sensible whodunnit of a year ago called "The Man Who Cheated Himself." The artist working on them without a cast of thousands or any epic-tainted notions of moviemaking, could putter round like a carpenter in his own shop; as a result of the low budget, there was very little pressure from the studio heads.

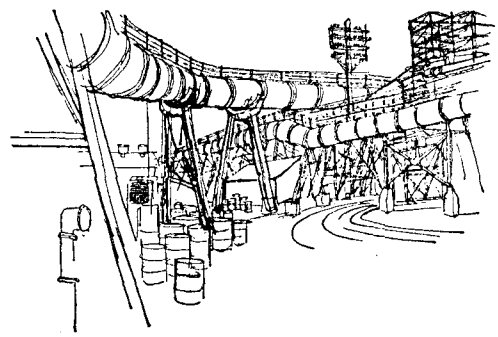
In 1943, Castle, the director of the Monogram melodrama "When Strangers Meet," could experiment with a couple of amateurs (*Bob Mitchum and Kim* Hunter), try out a then new Hollywood idea of shooting without studio lights in the sort of off-Broadway rented room where time seems to stand still for years and the only city sounds come through a postage stamp opening on the air-well. The movie was a hit with perceptive moviegoers, made a fair profit, and prepared audiences for two new stars and some of the uninvented-looking cinema later made famous in "Open City." All this was possible because they weren't driven to cater to cliché tastes.

Once, intellectual moviegoers performed their function as press-agents for movies that came from the Hollywood underground. But somewhere along the line the audience got on the wrong track. The greatest contributing cause was that their tastes had been nurtured by a kind of snobbism on the part of most of the leading film reviewers. Critics hold an eminent position that permits control of movie practice in one period by what they discerned, concealed, praised or kicked around in the preceding semester of moviemaking. I suggest that the best way to improve the audiences' notion of good movies would be for these critics to stop leading them to believe there is a new "classic" to be discovered every three weeks among vast-scaled "prestige" productions. And when they spot a good "B" to stop writing as though they'd found a "freak" product.

FROM ENGLAND

The Problem of Ownership

THE clock has been set back seven years as if Korea and the dollar gap had never been. Over here we are back in 1945, with nationalization in the center of the stage. The Labor party, since its Morecambe conference, has committed itself to nationalizing more industries, though it has not yet said which. The Conservative Party has made the denationalization of steel and road goods transport its main measures for this Parliamentary session. So far as public interest is concerned, this unburying of ancient hatchets promises to be a supreme flop. But there is enough behind it to make it worth examining.



One can hardly examine the Labor program, since no one, not even the Labor party, knows what it is. What the Conservatives are doing is at any rate visible. Steel, in particular, is a fairly straightforward proposition. The private companies kept their identity when they were nationalized; all that happened was that the Iron and Steel Corporation of Great Britain bought out their shares.

Everyone agrees that there must be some public authority to promote and, if necessary, undertake capital development in steel, prevent wasteful duplication of plant, fix maximum prices, and supervise research, training, and working conditions. There was such an authority before nationalization; there will be one after it. Denationalization seems in practice to mean little more than that the Iron and Steel Corporation will no longer be able to sack steel company directors whom it dislikes, as it has been busily doing this last year. Not, of course, that this is unimportant.

The long-distance lorries are a stickier proposition. The Government bought out three thousand seven hundred and sixty-six firms, many of them very small. In

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

the last four years their vehicles have been regrouped and many of them replaced. Depots have been closed. Not even the Conservative party claims that the old organization can now be restored. More serious is the fact that there is not, as in steel, a satisfactory pre-nationalization relation between competition and control to which to return.

Transport in all its branches is burdened with a tangle of historical anomalies, of the kind that justify the salaries of professors of transport economics, but drive operators to drink. It cost a third of a penny a mile by express train transport, whereas those by stopping and suburban train may cost anything up to two shillings or half a crown. But the former pay fares anything up to two and a half times as high as the latter.

Anomalies of this kind cannot, of course, be done away with overnight. On the strength of them London commuters have bought houses, and firms have built plants. A few months ago, when the Transport Commission tried to adjust London fares more closely to cost, the Government found itself in danger of an even bigger defeat in the municipal elections than it did in fact suffer, and promptly stepped in and forbade the Commission to go on.

To sort out this tangle would be difficult enough at the best of times. It is overwhelmingly difficult now, when the number of people really interested in nationalization-denationalization is small, and the number who are both interested and objective is tiny. The one large group involved which really seems to care is the road transport workers. The British Transport Commissions has the virtues as well as the vices of a bureaucracy. It used to be "Watch her, Joe, she's got no brakes." Nationalization has put brakes on the lorries in a sense Conservative propagandists have never thought of.

But steel workers could hardly care less. They have been doing nicely all along, whether the industry is public or private. The general public is about where it was in 1950, when a study of the working-class voters in a typical constituency showed that around sixty per cent were concerned, usually keenly so, about such topics as full employment, fair shares, and workers' control, but only around thirty per cent showed any interest in nationalization—or controls, or the closed shop—as a means to these ends.

The Labor party utters war-whoops and blood-curling threats about denationalization. But it was taken clean off its balance by the Morecambe resolution on new nationalization, and the research staff at Transport House have been working overtime ever since in an effort to catch up.

As for the Conservative party, the amount of attention it has bothered to give to working out its transport and steel proposals has been made lamentably obvious by its White Papers and Bills: especially in the case of transport. *The Economist,* strong supporter though it be of any move towards competition, headed its review of the first (July) version of the Transport Bill "The Transport Travesty." The unkindest cut came from the Associated British Chambers of Commerce, also by no means a socialist organization. The Chambers of Commerce, having seen the latest version of the Bill, invited the Minister of Transport to lunch and told him, publicly and to his face, that if "this crude piece of field surgery"—their Vice-President's words—was the best he could do, they preferred to stay socialized.

The truth is that, as the *Manchester Guardian* put it the other day, most people "feel there should be a change" in the organization of these and many other industries, but do not know quite what it is to be. If it were simply a matter of juggling with competition and control until the right balance was achieved, the task might not be so difficult. Labor would need to drop some of its prejudices against competition, and Conservatives to pay more attention in practice—as they do already in theory—to protecting workers' interests, and to public service and accountability. Both parties have already moved in the right direction.

But juggling with competition and control will almost certainly not do the trick. One always ends up, on that route, with too much of one or the other. The problem is to protect workers' interests, secure their responsible participation and interest, and insure public accountability without imposing a degree of State or trade union control which makes competition ineffective. This implies an advance in two directions; towards workers' control in the firm, and towards what might be called the "educated" profession. The really significant development in the British iron and steel industry in the last generation has been, not nationalization or public control, but the conversion of the British Iron and Steel Federation from an old-style, protective trade association into a real organ of leadership, with highly developed common services and a deep sense of responsibility to the public as well as to the trade. But Mr. Robert Shone, the Federation's Director, is an uncommon man, and not many trades have yet followed steel's example.

This line of thought, workers' participation or control plus the "educated" profession, is, of course, nothing new to Catholics. Some admirable proposals for a settlement in steel—nationalization rather than denationalization—were published a short time ago in the *Christian Democrat* by Mr. C. Taylor, of the Catholic Industrialists' Conference. It is excellent that a Catholic, and an employer, in a Catholic organ, should have come forward with proposals of this sort. It is also (to be a little unkind) gratifying, and a most promising sign, to find a Catholic not only saying what needs to be said but saying it in good time.

MICHAEL P. FOGARTY.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

THE STAGE

THE NATIONAL THEATRE OF GREECE

AN embarrassment of riches brought us the National Theatre of Greece within a short space of M. Jean-Louis Barrault's spectacular advent. The Greek ensemble, of which Alexis Minotis and his wife Katina Paxinou are perhaps the most illustrious figures, confined itself, with classic severity, to the Sophoclean tragedies, "Electra" and "Oedipus Rex" (translated into modern Greek). It was, in consequence, a limited exposition of the dramatic art they have nurtured through two decades, but nonetheless a rare and distinguished one: the splendors and miseries of classic drama have not often been apprehended with such power, subtlety and guile.

These were interpretations marked, above all, by a sharp and luminous intelligence. Mme. Paxinou and Mr. Minotis are eclectic, cosmopolitan artists, surely sensitive to the irrecoverable distance—made up of so many irreparable fluctuations of history, society, theology—which divides the modern consciousness from the mind of Sophocles and the Athenians.

Precisely this perception has enabled them to see that the problem central to the production of Greek drama is not so much that of conveying the meaning, as it is one of rendering it *accessible*. To grasp the fulness of reference in a play like "Oedipus Rex"—to submit oneself to the pressure of what Mr. Francis Fergusson has accurately termed its "tragic rhythm" — would compel an act of the imagination our experience all but forbids.

It was a sign equally of their love for Sophocles and their firm dramatic instinct that Mme. Paxinou, Mr. Minotis and their company performed so much of this act for us. In their disposition of those alien elements of the tragic Greek form, they displayed a flexibility of mind and technique which vastly increased the ease of our approach without vulgarizing it. The choral portions of the plays, particularly, have never appeared to such advantage. The Theban women and elders lost their exotic flavor, and took on a proper perspective which placed them crucially at the center of Greek theatre; one saw them as the instruments of Sophocles' perception, supporting a burden of the moral and spiritual weight of society.

Mme. Paxinou's Electra must surely be one of her most felicitous interpretations. This actress blends the tragic force of an older civilization and modern sensibility with devastating effects. She brings to the role an imaginative passion which rarely succumbs to rhetoric, and which achieves a maximum intensity within classic extremes. Here was a performance beautifully modeled on the Mediterranean line.

The Oedipus of Alexis Minotis, I found, by contrast, rather drier, even somewhat arid. He has not Mme. Paxinou's variety, and his correct, refined terror never really quite takes fire. Here, though, the language barrier was insuperable: one missed the steely clash of temper, the tragic play of irony, which gives the drama so much of its moral and imaginative splendor. Even without this dimension, however, there were theatrical images of profound evocative power: the first sombre view of the House of Atreus, or the scene in which Oedipus has begun to grasp his fate, and stands on an elevated stage, girded about by a chanting, dancing chorus. In these moments, one felt something of that prerational awe before the splendor and terror of life which is the essential classic quality. (*Closed after a limited engagement at the Mark Hellinger.*)

TIME OUT FOR GINGER

MR. Ronald Alexander's comedy is one of those gentle fictions which used to be manipulated so dexterously by Sally Benson and F. Hugh Herbert. The author takes us into a familiar domestic sea, and promptly leaves us awash with romantic adolescent daughters, brash high-school athletes, an acidulous mother, a harried father and an impertinent maid. This is the mixture as many times before, and Mr. Alexander's minor variations are competent, comfortable and commercial.

There is nothing very much right with the play, of course, but then nothing very much wrong either. Played with relish and any available wit by Melvyn Douglas, Polly Rowles, Philip Loeb and a gallery of charming adolescents, it makes for an agreeably undistinguished evening. The domestic flavor is occasionally so overpowering that you expect the ushers to start passing out home-made fudge. I foresee a long and brilliant future in the barn theatres. (*At the Lyceum.*)

RICHARD HAYES.

THE SCREEN

FATTY ACID WITH A BASE

ANYONE who thinks Richard Widmark's acting ability is limited to gangster roles and a maniacal laugh is going to be surprised at "My Pal Gus," a touching comedy about a millionaire father who hopes to solve all problems connected with his unruly son by putting him into a progressive school. As might be expected, it isn't only five-year-old Gus who is a problem, but the father also needs a little straightening out. And the teacher, effectively played

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

by Joanne Dru, is much wiser than her youth and snappy manner would indicate.

If it weren't that Widmark plays this father with convincing sincerity, "My Pal Gus" could easily sink to the soap-opera level; the last part of the film gets pretty involved when Widmark's ex-wife (Audry Totter at her nastiest) turns up and announces her Mexican divorce isn't legal and she's entitled to half of Widmark's properties. Averse to splitting his hard-earned million with anyone, Widmark sues Audry for desertion; and she, who is smart as well as diabolic, sues Widmark for a divorce, naming the school teacher as corespondent. The solution to the whole thing is what you'd expect from a movie that takes a casual attitude toward divorce and remarriage.

Although the psychology employed by scriptwriters Fay and Michael Kanin is quite elemental, they manage to brighten the situation with amusing lines, and Director Robert Parrish gets good performances out of his whole cast. I'm not sure that little George Winslow really acts at all; his bass voice, which first startled us in "Room for One More," continues to be his most startling asset.

LORETTA YOUNG suffers long and beautifully in "Because of You" as a parolee who falls in love with a wounded war veteran (Jeff Chandler), marries him before her year of parole is up and without telling him about her unsavory past, and then pays and pays and pays.

Miss Young looks radiant throughout—as a dope-peddler's moll in a blond wig, during her regeneration in prison, as a nurse's aid with her natural tresses not entirely covered by a cap, as a happy wife, as an unhappy ex-wife, as a magician's assistant, as the suffering mother of a maladjusted child, and finally while the sun sinks across the prairies, as a farmerette tending a sick calf. But somehow, for Loretta Young fans, of whom I am one, she can do no wrong.

THE makers of "Outpost in Malaya" couldn't decide if they were doing a soap opera about a marriage going on the rocks, a documentary about rubber plantations or a melodrama about bandit-ridden Malaya today. They combined the three themes, and, in spite of the valiant acting efforts of Claudette Colbert and Jack Hawkins, the good shots of Malaya and the tense excitement worked up when the plantation owners and native bandits fight it out, the results are hodge-podge.

FOR those who like their films big, lush and with problems Technicolor-covered, there's "Million Dollar Mermaid" which purports to tell the story of Annette Kellerman, from the nineties when she was a little girl with braces on her legs in Australia until many years later in Hollywood when she was again bed-ridden after an accident while making a movie. That this world-famous swimmer had no easy time of it, the film makes clear; but somehow Director Mervyn LeRoy fails to make Annette a very interesting person.

It is not the cast's fault that "Million Dollar Mermaid" is so flat. Esther Williams, in fine swimming form, is her attractive self; Victor Mature, David Brian, Walter Pidgeon are the men in her life. The script itself, however, lacks sparkle and the whole piece takes itself too seriously. But the water ballets are bigger and better than ever.

PHILIP T. HARTUNG.

BOOKS

The Claudel-Gide Correspondence

MARTIN TURNELL

AMONG the distinguished writers who used to attend Mallarme's Tuesday receptions in the Rue de Rome during the last decade of the nineteenth century were two promising young men who were already beginning to make their mark. Paul Claudel and Andre Gide were both disciples of Mallarme's, but they did not meet at his flat. They met at the home of Marcel Schwob in 1895—three years before the Master's death—and were at once attracted to one another.

The attraction was a curious one. Claudel, who was already filled with missionary zeal, was quick to sense Gide's spiritual unrest, and with his customary optimism saw a chance of making an important convert. On Gide's side, it appears to have been an attraction of opposites and he was evidently fascinated by a mind as different from his own as it could well be. Soon after the first meeting Claudel, who was in the consular service, was sent abroad and it is not until 1899 that we find him writing to Gide to thank him for a letter and the gift of two of his books. It was the beginning of a correspondence which was to last with gaps for over a quarter of a century.

When the war was over it was suggested to the two writers that the correspondence should be published in book form. They agreed with alacrity, placed all

Mr. Turnell, author of "The Novel in France," is one of England's leading literary critics.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

the surviving letters at the publisher's disposal and gave him all the help they could. The volume appeared in France in 1949 with a long introduction and notes by M. Robert Mallet. It has now been well translated as *The Correspondence between Paul Claudel and Andre Gide (Pantheon. $4).* Mr. John Russell, the translator, has preserved the original introduction and a generous proportion of the notes, and has added an interesting preface of his own. There are altogether one hundred and seventy-one letters, one hundred and twenty-five from Claudel and forty-six from Gide. What M. Mallet calls the 'regrettable' difference in numbers is explained partly by the fact that Gide was a less assiduous correspondent than Claudel and partly by the destruction of Claudel's archives when the French embassy at Tokyo was burned down in the earthquake of 1923. The result is an important, illuminating and dramatic document.

THE first letter begins with the formal "Dear Sir," but the correspondents were soon on easier terms. "My dear Gide" and "My dear Claudel" give way to "My dear friend," while in one letter Claudel actually remarks: "I am very fond of you." They both appear to admire one another's books and are both concerned over the state of contemporary French literature. "Wonderful *Connaissance de l'Est,* which I am re-reading with close attention," writes Gide in his diary. "The *importance* of your admirable poem must be asserted, in spite of those who do not recognize it," he says of Claudel's *Magnificat.*

Literature, however, is not the principal theme of the letters, and in spite of the immense attention that they give it, both writers are aware of deeper issues. "As for what people call 'Art'," remarks Claudel, "I had rather that they perished a thousand times over than that we should prefer such creatures to their Creator and the futile constructions of our imagination to the reality in which alone we may find delight." He does not believe in beating about the bush. In the same letter he tells his correspondent that "it is for you, my dear Gide, to realize the stage which you have reached in your life, to have no illusions as to the demands of the voice which summons you, to gauge the obstacles which stand in your way, and to see whether, in respect of absolute truth, you are still in that state of *invincible ignorance* which alone excuses the schismatic and the procrastinator. It is before God that you have to examine your own conscience."

This was written in 1905 and as the years pass the voice becomes more peremptory and more insistent. It is all very well for Gide to twist and turn, to reply that it would be "absurd to hope for (a solution)" and to say that all he is looking for is "a new and acceptable battle-ground." Claudel is up in arms when Gide complains, characteristically, that he cannot "imagine what can be *the* drama of Catholicism." He reminds him sternly of the text, "I came not to bring peace, but the sword," and dwells on "the dramatic, almost vertiginous character of orthodoxy."

In the years that follow, the letters give the impression that from Claudel's point of view things are going very well. A reference in one letter to Communion has a considerable effect on Gide. "What am I to say about the end of your letter?" he asks. "It touches all that is deepest in me, but I can remember enough of the burning piety of my adolescence to understand the felicity which you describe to me today." The fundamental problem of belief seems to have been overcome and Claudel has to address himself to other difficulties —Gide's allegiance to his Protestant family and his horror at the conduct of certain Catholics. "It's because you aren't like those others," writes Gide, "that I have listened to you with such attention. They use the crucifix as if it were a bludgeon; and as soon as their writings are called in question they hide behind the holy sacrament. To draw near to Christ for me is to draw away from them." In 1911 he reports the conversion of one of his sisters-in-law and Claudel really feels that the fish is about to fall into the net.

ALTHOUGH neither realized it, the drama was moving towards its climax. The letters written in 1913 show that Claudel was beginning to feel uneasy over reports that he had heard of *Les Caves du Vatican* on which Gide was then working. Serial publications of the novel began in the *Nouvelle Revue Francaise* in January, 1914. In March the crash occurred. A passage from the February instalment revealed the nature of Gide's anomaly and the enraged Claudel at last saw what had really been holding him back. "In the name of heaven, Gide," he writes from Hamburg, "how could you write the passage which I find on page 478 of the last issue of the *N. R. F.?* Don't you know that after *Saul* and *L'Immoraliste* you cannot commit any further imprudence?" He asks, somewhat unconvincingly, for reassurance, but Gide bridles. "What right have you to issue this summons?" he retorts. "In what name do you put these questions?" He makes no attempt to deny the charges, but asks for secrecy out of consideration for his wife, and contrives to suggest that he is the victim of "physiological determinism," which Claudel flatly rejects. Claudel was still so far from realizing the true character of his opponent, however, that he enlisted the help of Francis Jammes and provided the name and address of a suitable confessor whom Gide proposed to visit and naturally never did.

The explosion of 1914 was virtually the end of the correspondence and of this curious friendship. It is

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

true that a few more letters were exchanged during the next twelve years and the publication of the semi-apologetic *Numquidet tu . . . ?* in 1926 raised Claudel's hopes for a moment and made him feel, as he put it, that he could "resume his conversation" with Gide. Once again the hope was illusory for by the time the book was published Gide had shifted his ground and abandoned the position that it describes.

IN his preface, Mr. Russell remarks that "as the correspondence progresses, we realize that the two combatants regarded themselves, almost consciously, as plenipotentiaries of two great sections of the French people . . . The conflict is one that will never grow obsolete: that between authority and the individual." The writers were certainly conscious of their own importance and a certain lack of modesty in the readiness with which they gave permission for the correspondence to be published suggests that they may very well have been playing the roles attributed to them by Mr. Russell. I myself find it difficult to accept them as protagonists in a universal drama of "authority and the individual" nor can I subscribe to Mr. Russell's description of them as "two great artists at the height of their powers." Gide certainly received a considerable battering, but Claudel was obviously not the sort of person who could ever have converted him. The intellectual level of his apologetic is by no means impressive, and as I read the letters I found myself murmuring: "He'd never have got *me*."

I think that we must admit that the real interest of the correspondence is not theological but human. It is interesting for the portraits of the two combatants and as a strange, fascinating and somewhat repellent exercise in that particular kind of moral and intellectual strip-tease at which the French excel. Claudel is harsh, violent, rigid and intolerant; Gide supple, elusive, vain and treacherous.

Claudel is the better of the two. There is a warmth in his friendship which we never find in Gide's and he is much more conscious of his shortcomings and much franker than Gide, for all his famous sincerity. "I never see your handwriting without a quickening of the heart beats," he says in one letter to Gide, "I am always afraid that you will stop writing." "Shall I confess to you," he asks in another, "that you have always impressed me by that quality of 'distinction' to which children are so sensitive, and which has a special effect on a nature as heavy and plebeian as mine?"

Except at the time of the breach, Gide was never as straightforward as Claudel, and to discover what he really thinks we must look elsewhere. The French editor hit on the admirable device of inserting extracts from his diary in the appropriate places in the correspondence and this greatly increases its dramatic effect. For in these extracts we hear the disruptive mutter of Gide's true voice beneath the surface cordiality of his letters.

In 1912, when relations appeared to be excellent, Gide noted in his diary: "I should like never to have known Claudel. His friendship weighs on my thought and forces and embarrasses it." A few months later he describes a meeting that had taken place when Claudel was home on leave. "Paul Claudel is more massive, wider than ever; he looks as if he were seen in a distorting mirror; no neck, no forehead; he looks like a power-hammer . . . He talks of painting with an excess of stupidity. His speech is an unceasing flow that no objection, no interrogation ever stops. Any other opinion than his own has no justification and almost no excuse in his eyes."

IN one of the early letters Claudel had said that "we might have looked at one another for a long while, like china dogs on a mantleshelf." But these china dogs are capable of biting, and they bite hard. The most distressing thing about the letters is the discovery that the writers possess neither greatness nor true generosity. They are not an exhibition of strength, but a display of human frailty. Claudel and Gide both behave like any other men of letters and are just as much at the mercy of mood and emotion. They are incapable of making detached judgments on one another's works. When it suits their purpose they praise one another; when it doesn't they unhesitatingly damn one another. Claudel regards Gide as a record fish whom he hopes to land. As long, but only as long, as this appears a possibility he is prepared to flatter the writer. When the fish escapes he at once proceeds to vent on it his irritation over the failure of his own apologetic.

For Gide, the correspondence seems to have been another game of make-believe, but while it lasted he too was prepared to flatter a writer whom he could never have genuinely admired. We remember the "wonderful *Connaissance de l'Est*" in 1907, but in 1929 he finds *Le Soulier de satin* "staggering" for very different reasons. "It is hard to imagine that in another religion Claudel's shortcomings would have developed so unimpeded as in Catholicism." The taste left by the interview that Claudel gave to the newspaper, *Combat,* in 1947 (which is included in the book) is still sourer. "Mirrors fascinate Gide. His *Journal* is just a long series of poses in front of himself . . . His *Journal* is from that point of view a monument of insincerity." That is true, and not undeserved, but we need not be admirers of Gide to resent the palpable injustice of his observation: "I don't see that Gide has any talent at all."

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Lost Confidence

THE DRINKER. By Hans Fallada. Didier. $3.50.

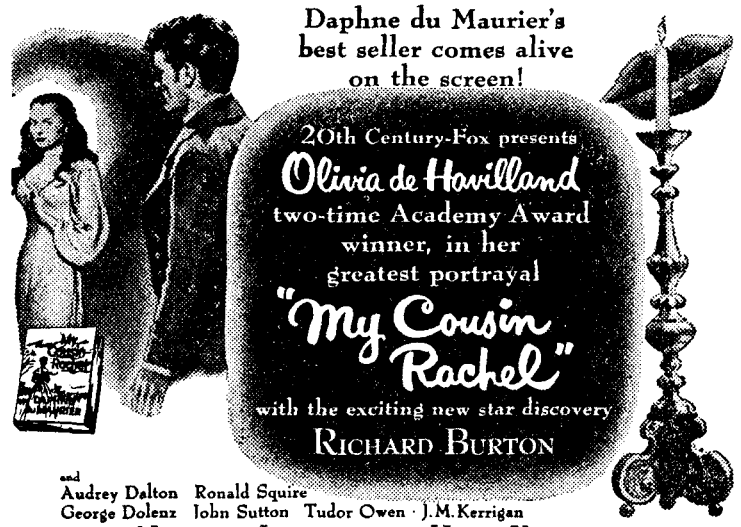
By EDWIN KENNEBECK

THIS is a bare, harsh study of a man's retreat from reality. One of the story's special virtues is that it centers around the man's psychological state, focusing not on the alcoholic whose personal failures are mentioned only to explain his addiction, but on the neurotic who imagines himself persecuted and therefore begins to drink excessively.

He is Erwin Sommer, a successful small-town businessman of forty. His stable, efficient wife, Magda, is prevented by certain circumstances from giving as much time as before to her husband's grocery business, which then suffers a few setbacks. Quite suddenly Sommer realizes how weak he is and how much of his success he owes to Magda. He loses confidence in himself, yet at the same time refuses to admit his dependence; his only reaction to the dilemma is to drink and forget it.

Sommer narrates his own depressing story, an inward-turning spiral of self-pity. Occasionally granting himself a few honest glimpses of his weakness, he is nevertheless too radically proud and feeble to handle the ordinary problems in his business and in his relationship with Magda. In spite of her bewildered attempts to help him, Sommer is eventually taken to prison and then to an asylum for criminals with pronounced mental disorders. After rejecting an opportunity to gain freedom he ends the tale with a shocking gesture of utter despair and degradation.

Unfortunately something happens, or fails to happen, at about the middle of the book, when the focus turns from Sommer's internal agony to the prison and asylum where his downfall is consummated. The tone becomes documentary rather than narrative. As we learn about the disgusting prison conditions and the machinations of a society of criminals, we somehow lose our horrifying intimacy with this tortured soul.


Daphne du Maurier's best seller comes alive on the screen!
20th Century-Fox presents
Olivia de Havilland
two-time Academy Award winner, in her greatest portrayal
"My Cousin Rachel"
with the exciting new star discovery
RICHARD BURTON
and
Audrey Dalton Ronald Squire
George Dolenz John Sutton Tudor Owen · J.M.Kerrigan
Produced by NUNNALLY JOHNSON Directed by HENRY KOSTER
Screen Play by NUNNALLY JOHNSON · From the Novel by Daphne du Maurier
COMING • CHRISTMAS DAY • RIVOLI B'way at 49th St.

"MAGNIFICENT! AMONG THE BEST OF 1952"—CUE Magazine
COLUMBIA PICTURES presents A STANLEY KRAMER Production
REX Harrison LILLI Palmer
THE FOUR POSTER
SUTTON
East 57th St. • PLaza 9-1411
ONLY NEW YORK SHOWING
Feature at: 12:15, 2:15, 4:15, 6:15, 8:15, 10:15
Special Added Attraction: George K. Arthur's "The Stranger Left No Card"

FILMS ON ART

THE educational use of 16mm. films has grown enormously these past few years. To meet the growing demand for a reliable guide through the great number of available films, a private foundation has underwritten this reference work.

FILMS ON ART
$4.00

The American Federation of Arts
1083 Fifth Avenue New York 28

BOOKS

★ Books: Used, Old, Rare
For Librarians, Collectors, Readers
Huge Stock. Reasonably Priced
Catalogs Free. Browsers Invited
Want Lists Solicited. Libraries Purchased
DAUBER & PINE BOOKSHOPS, INC.
66 Fifth Avenue, New York 11, N. Y.

★ Books, Linens, Gifts, *Catalogs*
IRISH INDUSTRIES DEPOT, Inc.
870 Lexington Ave. (near 65th), New York

CATHOLIC BOOKS

★ Catholic Books, Christmas Cards, Woodcarvings, Ceramics, Rosaries, Missals, Imports from Oberammergau, Belgium and France. THE GUILD BOOK SHOP, 117 East 57th Street, New York 22, N. Y. PLaza 3-0225. Catalogue on request.

★ Chesterton, Belloc & Baring Books
250 titles. Free Catalogue
Prosser, 2937 North Racine Ave.
Chicago 13, Illinois

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

But finally, near the end, we look upon it once again, and watch its final act of self-condemnation.

Hans Fallada, a German novelist whose writings put him out of favor with the Nazis in 1943, wrote *The Drinker* in code while waiting in prison to be tried on a charge of attempted murder. He was acquitted finally, and died in Berlin in 1947. The novel was decoded after his death. There is occasionally a certain awkwardness of idiom in the translation, and the story oscillates between the past tense to the "historical present," sometimes within a chapter, and at least once within a sentence.

The story of Erwin Sommer, contrasted with the sketchy but sharp implications of his wife's simple fortitude, cannot be called a great tragedy. Its hero has no real aspirations except those of a dreamer unable to master the real forces that threaten him, afraid to recognize his false suspicions for what they are, and unwilling to accept help from his wife or his friends. However, it is intelligently written and moving. It is not a tract; it is shocking but not "sensational." Sommer is rendered as a character complex enough to be simultaneously despicable and pitiable. Weak, foolish, proud to an exasperating degree, he dreams and suffers in his isolation, leaving us horrified and baffled.

The Tragedy of Eisenstein

SERGEI M. EISENSTEIN. By Marie Seton. A. A. Wyn. $8.50.

By WALDEMAR GURIAN

SERGEI M. EISENSTEIN is the film director who established the world reputation of the Soviet cinema with his "Potemkin," a film which celebrated the mutiny on a Tsarist Black Sea cruiser during the revolution of 1905. He died in 1948—never having again achieved the success of this universally acclaimed work. His long sojourn abroad had ended in failure. After a time in Hollywood, he had gone to Mexico, financed by Upton Sinclair and his wife. But their expectations were not fulfilled. In a letter to Miss Seton dated April 5, 1950, Upton Sinclair claims that Eisenstein "spent a lot of his time . . . shooting human beings in degrading positions, and he used his leisure in making elaborate drawings of pornography."

After his return to the U.S.S.R. he became a victim of the Communist cultural policies, though his patriotic film "Alexander Nevsky" was well received. Miss Seton who, as the publisher says, has an "unrivaled knowledge of Eisenstein both as man and as artist," tells how his creative forces were slowly but systematically destroyed by the Soviet regime. This description is particularly impressive because Miss Seton tries to avoid any condemnation of Bolshevik methods and policies. But the facts speak for themselves. For example, she de-

More about those

MEDICAL KITS...

Did you notice in The Commonweal recently the request to help send Medical Kits to Missionaries? The need is still very urgent. We are having 400 Kits made ready, and must pay for them eventually. By giving $30, or whatever part of it you can, you will share in the immense merit of saving so many bodies and souls. Send your gift as soon as you can to the Catholic Medical Mission Board, 10 West 17th Street, New York 11, N. Y.

WHY NOT...?

WORSHIP

The Magazine of the Liturgical Apostolate

THE MASS + SACRAMENTS + SOCIAL ACTION

EQUAL

THE FULL CHRISTIAN LIFE

1 year - $3.00 — Canada & Foreign - $3.50
2 years - $5.00 — Canada & Foreign - $6.00

WORSHIP

St. John's Abbey, Collegeville, Minn.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

scribes how Eisenstein was forced to omit all scenes showing Trotsky from his "October," prepared for the tenth anniversary of the October Revolution. For" October" "showed Trotsky as a hero of the Revolution when now . . . Trotsky had proved himself a betrayer."

"Boris Shumyatsky"—the Soviet director of the film industry—"who in less than a year was indicted for sabotaging . . . set himself as judge of Eisenstein; as a then trusted Bolshevik he imposed his will (on Eisenstein) and destroyed 'Berlin Meadow' as ruthlessly as Upton Sinclair had destroyed 'Que Viva, Mexico' five years before." And during a conclave of film-workers, "not a single person came to the defense of Eisenstein."

The second part of his "Ivan the Terrible" was criticized by the Communist Central Committee and never shown, and Eisenstein was publicly grateful for the "hard and just criticism of the Central Committee" and "promised to master the Lenin-Stalin method of perception of real life and history." Further, after the conclusion of the Ribbentrop-Molotov pact of August 1939, the Jew Eisenstein had to endure the humiliation of celebrating in a radio talk the pact with the anti-Semitic Nazis as a "basis for increased cultural cooperation between the two great peoples."

The careful biography of Miss Seton, who discusses with astonishing frankness even the most intimate details of Eisenstein's life and character, proves (probably against the will of the author) that Eisenstein was an arch-individualist, desperately looking for a new faith, dissatisfied with his overconscious theories on art. He accepted the Russian Revolution as a destructive event and as a manifestation of the masses in their elementary revolt against the old order, but the totalitarian planning and control of Soviet policies was alien and unintelligible to him.

On the other hand, he could not accept western bourgeois society. Therefore he tried—not very successfully—to accommodate himself to the requests of the Soviet masters, escaping from them into the eccentricities of his private life and the seemingly clear confusion of his theories of art. Despite his claims to the contrary, he belongs to the world of artistic experiments which had developed in Russia after the beginning of the twentieth century and which has been destroyed by Soviet "socialist realism" after some of its representatives were used or favored in the first anarchical phase of the revolution. Eisenstein the anarchist could get a public funeral in Moscow because he had capitulated before the merciless power which had forced him to bow publicly to those in control. His private clowneries were not taken seriously.

Two hundred illustrations make Miss Seton's book very attractive. The wealth of facts and documentary material permits the critical reader to go beyond the sometimes too naive and benevolent interpretations of the friend of S. M. Eisenstein.

The Birth of Cinema

TWO REELS AND A CRANK. By Albert E. Smith, in collaboration with Phil A. Koury. Doubleday. $3.75.

By DAN RODDEN

THE beginning stages of an art form, scarcely ever productive of the master work, are yet full of untidy fascination for the devotee. Albert E. Smith's art form—as he would never call it—has been the moving pictures (his book, *Two Reels and a Crank,* virtually defies you to use the artier term, "cinema"), and he was in at the very beginning. It is a tale of roguery and connivance that he has to tell, and he, with his partners at the Vitagraph Company, J. Stuart Blackton and "Pop" Rock, are the picaresque heroes. There are no villains—Mr. Smith takes an amoral view of the whole proceedings—but if there were, Thomas A. Edison would probably head the list.

Smith's gusty set of anecdotes is

Symbol of Excellence
Cavanagh
Gift Certificates
If desired, certificate will be enclosed
in a miniature stud box.
$20, $30, $40 and more.
MAIL AND TELEPHONE ORDERS, PLAZA 9-3054
Cavanagh Hats
PARK AVENUE AT 47th STREET, NEW YORK 17

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

The Commonweal This Christmas!

The priest-worker on his way to his job in a Paris factory and the Mexican peons on a religious pilgrimage—taken from recent issues of this magazine—appear here to remind you of certain advantages of Commonweal Christmas gift subscriptions. They suggest the warm human interest and range of material that make The Commonweal so welcome in many homes.

It brings a wealth of good reading, but The Commonweal is not an expensive Christmas gift. If you order more than one subscription (you may, if you wish, include your own renewal regardless of date), the bargain is even greater. A single subscription is $7; two, $11.50; three, $15; four $18. The savings are substantial.

Commonweal Christmas gift subscriptions begin next week with the special Christmas Issue. Last minute gift orders may be telephoned to this office or wired collect up to noon on Christmas Eve. Your gift notifications will be sent out air mail and special delivery when necessary, in order to reach your friends and relatives by Christmas Day.

THE COMMONWEAL, 386 Fourth Ave., New York 16 (MU. 3-9685)

Enclosed is $7. Send The Commonweal as a Christmas gift to:

NAME .....

STREET .....

CITY .....

MY NAME IS .....

STREET .....

CITY .....

12/19/52

no story of early Hollywood; that plastic suburb is lucky to be mentioned in the closing thirty pages of his book. Nothing about Cecil de Mille, *The Squaw Man,* Goldwyn, the Keystone Kops, or the Wampus Baby Stars. This is about the beginnings: about Teddy Roosevelt pausing midway up San Juan Hill to strike a pose for the cameras, about Smith and Richard Harding Davis venturing uncertainly into the midst of the Boer War, about Smith and his partner, Blackton, staging the battle of Santiago Bay in a studio tank, with Mrs. Blackton blowing across puffs of cigarette smoke to represent cannon discharges. It is about the patent wars, about the "cinematographer" who tried to photograph the Hindu rope trick, and about Sidney Drew, who breakfasted upon eight Manhattans.

It is an honest story (Mr. Smith adamantly refuses to rationalize or "second-guess") and completely without rancor. If it is also without chronology, documentation, or style, *Two Reels and a Crank* remains an amusing and absorbing contribution to our interest in the early movies.

Peasant Roots

THE BLACK EARTH. By Hans Habe. Putnam. $3.50.

By GEORGE MILES

IN this book, which employs every possible hackneyed expression and incident, there are, in fact, few references to the black earth. It should not have required much more time for the publisher to suggest a better title—*The Countess and the Peasant,* or *Silently Sows the Serf.* However, since this story is a complete failure even by best-seller standards the absence of a smash title is of little importance.

In an improbable manner Bela Sulyok, a Hungarian peasant, moves from the pig sty in which he was born to the bed of the Countess whose family rules the region, to the Communist Party and officer ranks of the Red Army, to the revolutionary cabinet post of Agriculture Minister, charged with the job

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

4 BOOKS FOR CHRISTMAS GIFTS

1 FOR MEN OF ACTION
Reflections on the spiritual problems facing the laity. From the experiences of Father Montscheuil, S.J.
2nd Printing 3.00

2 CHRISTIAN DESIGN FOR SEX
Father Buckley, S.M., explains attitudes and principles needed by parents and teachers 3.50

3 MANY ARE ONE
Popular presentation of the social nature of the Catholic Church by Father Leo Trese. 2.50

4 ACCENT ON PURITY
Father Haley's, C.S.C., guide for sex education with outline course.
3rd Revised Edition .25

Ask your bookdealer for our new catalog
CHRISTIAN PERSPECTIVES
Fides Publishers
21 W. Superior, Chicago 10, Illinois

CIGARS 100 for $4.95 Postpaid

Packed 25 in vacuum tin. Factory fresh, all Havana Filler. Made in Tampa, Fla. Full size Perfectos. 100% money-back guarantee. Send check or money order. Charge accounts invited. Special discounts to institutions and quantity buyers. A complete line of popular cigars, candy, and razor blades also at wholesale prices. Write for cigar price list and quotations on your other requirements.

ACE MAIL ORDER CO.
East Orange 23, N. J.

JOHN McCORMACK
DOMESTIC AND IMPORTED RECORDS
ENRICO CARUSO
Catholic and Irish Records
Catalogue Mailed Free on Request

Blarney Castle Products Co.
Box 102, Times Plaza Sta.
Brooklyn 17, N. Y.

of dividing the land in his native districts, and, finally, to death by gunfire from Communists when he revolts and leads his people against the oppressor.

Mr. Habe intended to show how a peasant who was tortured by the slavery imposed by rich landowners turned to the Communists as a way of relieving his people and restoring their personal rights, and, in the end, rejected Communism because it was, too, a form of slavery. The development of this creditable idea into a novel fails by a great margin. No character, including the hero, is seen long enough to form an identity; no description rises above the most obvious and the dialogue is disconcerting in its triteness and sentimentality.

FILMS ON ART, 1952. Ed. by Wm. Chapman. The American Federation of Arts, New York. $4.

AS the only comprehensive and evaluative catalogue of 16 mm. films on art subjects, this new book is indispensable for anyone planning institutional film programs. The heart of the book is the technical and critical description of some five hundred available films, ranging from simple instructional films on art for children, to highly sophisticated and occasionally brilliant film studies of the masters, old and new. Six essays by critics and museum and school people form a kind of textbook for the use of art films. The book, handsomely designed and bound, has many stills from the films. It should find a permanent place in any film library.

REVIEWERS

Edwin Kennebeck is a new contributor. His work has appeared in several Catholic publications and at one time he was a member of the *Renascence* editorial staff.

Waldemar Gurian is a member of the Notre Dame faculty. He is editor of the Review of Politics and has written several books on Communism and the Soviet Union.

Dan Rodden, another new contributor, teaches at La Salle College in Philadelphia.

George Miles is a free-lance writer who is now living in Kirkwood, Missouri.

Colleges

PENNSYLVANIA

ROSEMONT COLLEGE

Rosemont, Pa. A Catholic College for Women conducted by the Religious of the Society of the Holy Child Jesus. Accredited by the Association of American Universities. Situated on the Main Line of the Pennsylvania Railroad. Eleven miles from Philadelphia. Address the Registrar for information. Telephone Bryn Mawr 4514.

MARYLAND

COLLEGE OF NOTRE DAME OF MARYLAND

North Charles St., Baltimore 10, Maryland. A fully accredited Catholic College for Women, conducted by the School Sisters of Notre Dame. Courses leading to B.A. degree, with concentration in Art, Languages, Literature, Sciences, Music, Social Studies, Speech, Mathematics. Philosophy and Theology. Workshops in Creative Writing. Education courses leading to teacher certification. Pre-medical and laboratory technician training. Full Physical Education program, including Swimming. Address the Registrar.

MINNESOTA

THE COLLEGE OF ST. CATHERINE

A Liberal Arts College for Women. Awards the B.A., B.S., and B.S. in Library Science degrees. Approved by the Association of American Universities. Liberal arts, nursing, home economics, teaching, and physical education. Conducted by the Sisters of St. Joseph of Carondelet. For information address the Dean, 2004 Randolph Avenue, St. Paul 1, Minnesota.

RHODE ISLAND

PORTSMOUTH PRIORY SCHOOL

Portsmouth, Rhode Island, 23 miles from Providence, 8 miles from Newport, on inland waters of Narragansett Bay. Conducted by American Monks of the English Benedictine Congregation, assisted by Lay Masters. Five forms, 8th grade and four years of high school. Standard Preparatory Course for all colleges and technical schools. Added opportunities in Mathematics and Languages. College Board Examination. Full facilities for athletics including sailing. Address the Secretary.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

1st Lieutenant Lloyd L. Burke
U.S. Army
Medal of Honor

THE RED KOREAN strongpoint had stalled our attack; Lieutenant Burke saw that a breakthrough must be made. Rallying 35 men, he crept close to the enemy bunkers. He laid down a grenade barrage. Then he ran forward to an

exposed knoll and opened a one-man pitched battle. He turned a light machine gun into the Red position. He caught live enemy grenades in mid-air and threw them back. Once he killed three men with his pistol. Before sunset Lieutenant Burke and 35 men had defeated 300. The lieutenant says:

"Every day, men who fought in Korea are coming home. They're finding jobs—partly because they and you and I own nearly 50 billion dollars' worth of Defense Bonds. For Bond savings—which protect our own families—are also building a great backlog of *national* prosperity. Reason enough for investing in Bonds—don't you agree?"

★ ★ ★

Now E Bonds earn more! 1) All Series E Bonds bought after May 1, 1952 average 3% interest, compounded semiannually! Interest now starts after 6 months and is higher in the early years. 2) *All maturing E Bonds* automatically go on earning *after maturity*—and at the new higher interest! Today, start investing in better-paying Series E Bonds through the Payroll Savings Plan.

Peace is for the strong! For peace and prosperity save with U.S. Defense Bonds!

The U. S. Government does not pay for this advertisement. It is donated by this publication in cooperation with the Advertising Council and the Magazine Publishers of America.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED